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DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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TAGS: PGOV KJUS KCRM EAID KDEM UNMIK YI

SUBJECT: KOSOVO: DISCIPLINED ASSEMBLY SUPPORTS AHTISAARI
PROPOSAL, UNITY TEAM

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In contrast to its February 9 marathon session that ended in only half-hearted support for the Ahtisaari proposal and the work of the Kosovo negotiating team (the "Unity Team"), the Assembly on March 14 warmly received the report of three Unity Team members on the last "elephant round" of negotiations in Vienna on March 10. The session was disciplined and positive, a welcome demonstration of what the Assembly is capable of as a decision on Kosovo's final status approaches. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Three members of the Kosovo "Unity Team" -- President Fatmir Sejdiu, Prime Minister Agim Ceku and main opposition leader Hashim Thaci -- went before a special session of the Kosovo Assembly on March 14 to report on the final "elephant round" of talks in Vienna on March 10. The session was held the same day President Ahtisaari presented his report to the UN. LDK presidency member Sabri Hamiti chaired the session in Speaker Kole Berisha's absence. President Sejdiu spoke first, and said the ball is now in the UN Security Council's court. He called the Ahtisaari proposal a "painful compromise" necessary to pave Kosovo's way to independence. He stressed that there would be no formal connections with Serbia, but that minorities, particularly Serbs, would be given strong guarantees. He expressed his determination to implement the agreement and said it would be reflected in Kosovo's new constitution.

¶3. (U) PM Ceku focused on his government's "successes" in laying the foundation for the status resolution. He also thanked the opposition and Kosovo society for showing unity during the process, and said the "reasonable compromises" that were made would result in a functional state within existing borders. He said he expected the UNSC to replace resolution 1244, support the Ahtisaari proposal, and mandate a future international presence for Kosovo.

¶4. (U) Opposition leader Thaci focused on the negotiations, saying that Kosovars welcomed the status proposal along with the international community, that he hoped the Russians would "remain on board," and that the U.S. was "clear on the future

of Kosovo." Calling on citizens to maintain unity, Thaci emphasized that the proposal was the basis, not the limit, of Kosovo's future.

¶15. (U) Caucus leaders' comments followed, each in turn expressing support for the Unity Team. Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) caucus leader Gjylnaze Syla thanked Kosovo's friends for helping bring Kosovo into the family of the international community. Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) caucus leader Jakup Krasniqi said PDK supports the process and that the "painful compromise" is in Kosovo's best interests. There were some critical voices, including People's Movement of Kosovo (LPK) leader (and E.O.-listee) Emrush Xhemajli, Democratic League of Dardania (LD) caucus leader Ramadan Kelmendi, and PDK gadfly Xhevata Bislimi, who criticized provisions of the package and the Unity Team for not giving it more of an airing with the Kosovo public. However, even these voices were less harsh than usual.

¶17. (SBU) COMMENT: This special session requested by the Unity Team demonstrated that Assembly leaders have it in them to run a well-organized show of support for the Ahtisaari package. That is good, because in the coming weeks the Assembly will be called upon to maintain this positive drumbeat as the UNSC begins the difficult work of getting agreement on the package. END COMMENT.

¶18. (SBU) U.S. Office Pristina clears this cable in its entirety for release to U.N. Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW